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Criticism Editors

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1 MY CHAPTER UPON LINES: MOTION, DEVIATION, AND LINEATION IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH AESTHETICS

Scott R. MacKenzie

This essay argues that the eighteenth-century emergence of algebraic and arithmetic methods that require only numeric operators and that do not base their claims to truth upon Euclidean axiomatic geometric magnitudes and relations (lines, angles, proportions) transformed the ontological status of lines. For classicist geometers, the points and magnitudes of Euclid had a status akin to the Longinian sublime: the classical line is not simply a symbol mediating an absent truth; rather, the classical line should be understood as the thing itself. After arithmetization, however, the line is only an inscription, another symbol among many, subject to the gulf between signifier and signified. It is also relegated to an effect of, rather than the organizing principle of, motion, and hence enters history. Aesthetic theorists contribute significantly to the reconceptualization of lineation. From William Hogarth's infinite variety, to Edmund Burke's insensible deviation, to Laurence Sterne's digressive progression and William Gilpin's easy line, aesthetic orthodoxies arise that are founded in deviation from rigid prescription and from prior axiomatic models. Aesthetically and politically, a positively construed but semantically empty notion of deviation helps to generate the fantasy of subjects in relationships to spectacles and institutions that are not mediated by any ideological structures other than personal affective sensation. Precisely because the Burkean/Gilpinesque subject/spectator recognizes himself as deviant (which is to say ungoverned by doctrine, fanaticism, or standards imposed against the grain of his own intuitions), his participation in the frame of polity and the spectacle of nation can be understood as wholly natural and volitional, not to say homogeneous. At the same time, the aesthetics of deviation can be seen as key to the modernist avant-garde, preserving a close parallel between its premises and the supposedly radically distinct values of bourgeois aesthetics.

27 MOOD, PROVISIONALITY, AND PLANETARITY IN MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S *A SHORT RESIDENCE IN SWEDEN, NORWAY, AND DENMARK*

Enit Karafili Steiner

This essay reads Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796) alongside Gayatri Spivak's concept of planetarity and Martin Heidegger's phenomenology of mood. The essay

suggests that *A Short Residence* educates readers in a planetary mindset by conveying a correspondence between two positions: an involuntary and a reflected orientation towards the earth and its human and non-human forms. Mood inscribes provisionality as a method that lends elasticity to Wollstonecraft's cosmopolitan philosophy, bequeathing to this philosophy the obligation and capacity to generate its own revisions and critique. This method, or way of being and writing about being, can be understood as training, in Spivak's words, to "planet-feel" and "planet-think." Provisionality as both mood and method of inquiry compels Wollstonecraft's narrator to re-write the self and anticipate alterity; to ponder the incomplete state of her experiences and convictions without being paralyzed by them; and, in the throes of doubt, to impart to readers her responsiveness to everything that the earth discloses to mind and body.

51 THE ECOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVE: EDWARD
ABBAY, THE NEW LEFT, AND ENVIRONMENTAL
AUTHENTICITY
Alexander Menrisky

This essay explores a narrative conflict between selfhood and ecology in Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* in order to gain an understanding of how New Left thought—specifically, its politics of direct governance and individual authenticity—has left an impression on literary representations of nature and wilderness. Abbey's seemingly apolitical stance is deceiving, given his pursuit of the alternative social structures and self-fulfillment crucial to New Left politics. If Abbey shares the New Left's intellectual lineage and its distrust of state apparatuses, however, he does not necessarily consider authenticity a politically useful value, especially for environmental thinking.

This article advances two closely intertwined arguments. First, I contend that when married to an ecological paradigm, the rhetoric of authenticity deployed by utopian liberation discourse of the 1960s ultimately collapses distinctions between individual and ecosystem. Second, I read Abbey against this backdrop to suggest that, far from uncritically celebrating nature's purity, nature writers of the era crystallize this confusion as a representational tension between self and system that results from the commingling of appeals to authenticity and ecological interconnectivity. Abbey comes to understand his personality as a matter of style and effect rather than authenticity, precisely because his interest in his environment leads him to believe that essence amounts to matter, and an identification with matter alone would diminish the very personality that loves and aims to care for the environment in the first place. As a result, Abbey performs a compelling critique of authenticity's rhetorical usefulness to environmentalism.

73 MODERNISM AS GESTURE: THE EXPERIENCE
OF MUSIC, SAMUEL BECKETT, AND PERFORMED
BEWILDERMENT

Ronald Schleifer

This paper examines gesture in music and literature—it presents a “theory of gesture”—culminating in a close analysis of Samuel Beckett’s *Not I* in the contexts of psychology and neurology. It examines gesture in relation to music, free indirect discourse in literary texts (with Joyce as example), speech-act theory, and Beckett’s play as it was performed for television. In the course of its argument, it analyzes the neurobiology of gesture and signaling—from studies in cognitive psychology, evolutionary biology, and semiotics—in the context of what Colin MacCabe, following Eugene Jolas, calls “the revolution of the word” in literary modernism. In its detailed argument, it focuses on the “performativity” of modernist literary arts by examining literary texts—from Joyce and Beckett—in relation to gestures in music, and especially the performative gestures of popular musical performance.

97 LYRIC NOISE: LISA ROBERTSON, CLAUDIA RANKINE,
AND THE PHATIC SUBJECT OF POETRY IN THE MASS
PUBLIC SPHERE

Andrew Gorin

This essay takes the image of the noise-filled television screen that appears as a visual refrain in Claudia Rankine’s *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely* as the starting point for a discussion of phatic language in her work and in the work of the poet Lisa Robertson. Phatic expressions are signifying acts that indicate merely that a channel for communication is open, that signification *can* occur. Analyzing Robertson’s and Rankine’s uses of noisy phatic pronouns—pronouns that, in being reduced to a deictic potentiality, gesture to their own function as indexes of a virtual and noisy mass of possible subjective projections—the article argues that a phatic mode of subjectivity and address can be understood as typical of lyric poetry’s response to the communicative situation of the mass public sphere. Comparing Robertson’s and Rankine’s uses of the phatic pronoun “you” in their respective books *Cinema of the Present* and *Citizen*, it observes in Robertson’s work an affirmation of subjective indeterminacy that is countered by Rankine’s tendency to show us scenes in which subjective interiors are, rather, overdetermined as a result of racialization. There is, furthermore, a racial and affective dimension that accrues to Rankine’s reduction of lyric interiority to its phatic ground, one that represents a limit to affective exchange that is nonetheless the means by which an experience of shared affect becomes possible. The article concludes by locating Robertson’s and Rankine’s uses of the phatic mode on a historical trajectory that traces back to midcentury critiques of a dominant conception of lyric.

Reviews

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